THE ART EXHIBITION CATALOGUES OF THE CURT VALENTIN AND BUCHHOLZ GALLERIES REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

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78.N.

André Masson

ANDRE
MASSON

RECENT WORK
AND
EARLIER PAINTINGS

April 7 – May 2, 1953

CURT VALENTIN GALLERY

32 EAST 57 STREET · NEW YORK 22

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The *Curt Valentin Gallery* has shown the work of *André Masson* in 1942, 1943, 1944, 1945, 1947 and 1949. The present exhibition contains 17 of his recent paintings of 1951 and 1952, recent lithographs and some earlier paintings from 1923 through 1948 showing the artist's development up to the recent paintings.

Works by André Masson are in the collections of the following museums in the United States: Baltimore Museum of Art; Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Virginia Museum of Art, Richmond; San Francisco Museum of Art; Toledo Museum of Art; Phillips Gallery, Washington, D. C.

Cover: Catalogue No. 19. Pines and Rocks. 1953.

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TOWARDS BOUNDLESSNESS

Previously—in what people now call my old style—it seems to me that my primary concern was "expression." Yes, expression with no regard for the medium: violence and perturbation with very explicit delineation and color and deliberately obvious construction.

I was forgetting that my earliest work manifested a dream-like inclination, a longing to be infinite, *a taste for the secret within the visible: the aim to be, at the same time,* perceptible *and* concealed.

After so many seasons spent in the Hades of art, fate decided that I would be cast forth from it, only to find myself again faced with the choice: that of stressing the poetic aspect of painting rather than the mechanical construction and formal paroxysm, in order to accentuate the pictorial *in preference to the* linear.

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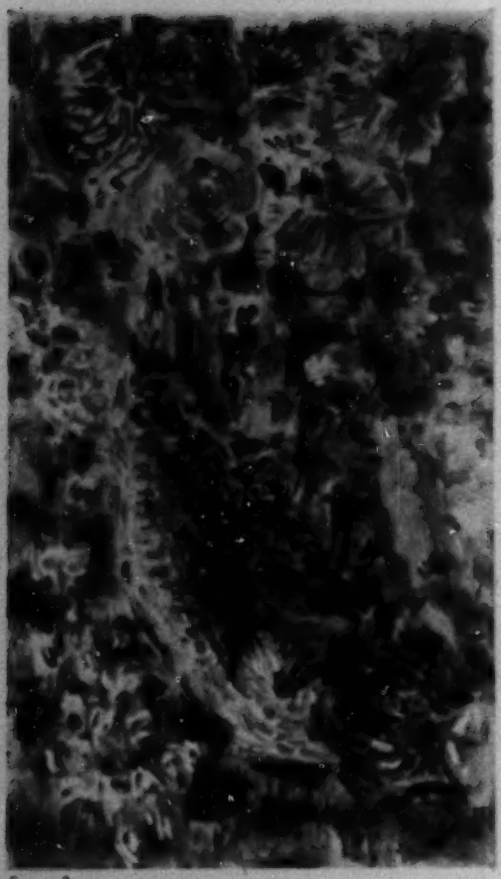

[11]

I uncover boundlessness, expansion through light, universal fusion (primitive color and the panorama dissect and narrow the pictorial field). A delicate sensualism makes me burst the last chains that still bind me to the "spirit of weightiness." I learn to know the genuinely open and discontinuous form. Of course, I no longer lean on the dimensions of the canvas. From the object, which has become free and no longer oppressive, there emanates a tension more and more diaphanous, prolonged in echos in every direction, to the very limits of the given surface. The supreme lesson of Turner and the spiritual message of Zen painting have come to me: that which goes counter to the prevailing taste is, for me, the most precious of things.

Whatever is scorned, despised, or not understood by the society in which one lives has prospects for the future. In any case, with this hope in the future, I have no thought of abandoning my subject: after all, we are dealing with boundlessness, *but on another plane!*

Aix-en-Provence
February 1953

—ANDRE MASSON

ANDRE MASSON

Blueh auf, gefrorner Christ,
der Mai ist fur der Tur:
Du bleibest ewig tot,
bluhst Du nicht jetzt und hier.

ANGELUS SILESIUS (1624-77)

The comprehension of every great painter is made difficult by the academism of the moment, which, of necessity, he opposes. The faces of academism are multiple, like the masters whose tradition it thinks it is continuing, but whom, in fact, it caricatures. Yet few periods have known academic decadence comparable to that which presents us with the lamentable spectacle of artisans who have imperfectly understood the message of their elders and who, under the name of abstract art, offer simply decorative arrangements. Their apologists proclaim them as the avant-garde of the plastic art of our times, and their partisans, naively believing in an evolution of forms within a vacuum, imitate them automatically.

The art of André Masson (and especially the current phase of his art) can only horrify the zealots of abstract pseudo-art. It is not they whom I address, but those who have kept intact their sensitivity to a work of art. And to these, I say: art transforms itself according to the spiritual needs of the times. The fine period before 1914, carefree and happy, allowed us the admirable adventure in plastic verification and reconstruction which is called cubism. Braque wrote at the time: "One must always remember that painting is not an all-purpose art." In other words, the problem was to rework the grammar and syntax of plastic art, and this task necessarily limited the themes. It may be said that the "heroic period" of cubism was occupied only with the study and figuration of solids. Society at the time was sufficiently detached from the cares of life to encourage and appreciate such an art of pure plastic delight. This society collapsed on August 2, 1914. André Masson was wounded in the first World War. For twenty-five

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years, his work has borne the stamp of the horror he felt then—horror which was revived by the Spanish civil war, the beginning of which he saw, and by the second World War.. The massacres, the rapes, all the atrocities he paints, haunt his contemporaries as much as himself.

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This tragic painter expresses the sentiments of everyone. We know that in discarding the matrix of surrealism, Masson succeeded in profiting from it. He had been one of the surrealist painters. He was obliged to be, for surrealism marked precisely the first reaction against cubism, not only by affirming the power of painting to say everything, but also by striving to protect the freshness of the initial emotion, the spontaneity of the artist, after cubism, which wanted to fix everything known about the object in question. Surrealism, however, was vitiated by the nihilist heredity of the Dada movement and by its naive adherence to Freudianism. And most of the surrealist painters did not know how to get rid of the language of their fine arts academies, even when they were foundering in the bizarre.

As for André Masson, he has always been conscious of the total freedom of plastic expression which marks the results of cubism. It may be said

without paradox that he, and other artists who react against cubism, are its true successors, and not those who imitate its appearance without having understood its message.

Masson has seldom lived in Paris. The rise of Franco forced him from Spain. He came to live at Lyons-la Forêt, near Rouen. Faced with the monstrosities of Hitler, he left for the United States. The shadow of war was always present in his work. He returned to France in 1945; and, after a brief stay at Poitou, where for the first time the black veil seemed to part—notably in the scenes of La Rochelle, he settled at Aix-en-Provence.

Then the miracle occurred. The horror vanished. Masson discovered life, stronger than death; nature, new at each moment, with which he felt himself one. His recent work is an overwhelming message of joy. With the partridge this Panic painter slips through the grass wet with dew; he drinks in the brook with the thrush; he soars over the canyon with the hawk. He breathes with the flowers of the almond-tree; in the night, he opens up with the fruit of the pomegranate. Is this happy painting a portent of better times, or is it a last ray of sunshine before the destruction of our Europe? Whatever the case, let us not refuse this marvelous exaltation, even if it might be the last. Grim-faced puritans insist that this art is a regression towards impressionism. It is not that at all. Certainly, this neo-romanticism (Masson was always romantic) had to have earlier bases than cubist classicism. When faced with a similar situation Delacroix turned to the Venetians, Rubens, and Watteau just as Masson turned to him, to Renoir and Monet. But Masson also discovered great China, as the cubists had discovered black Africa. This indicates that the matter is something entirely different from impressionism. The "fortunate moment" that stirs Masson's emotion is quite different from the disinterested study of light that Monet did in the "Meules." It is only Masson's technique of painting which is kin to the impressionists, because he was concerned with restoring all the potentialities of the technique of painting

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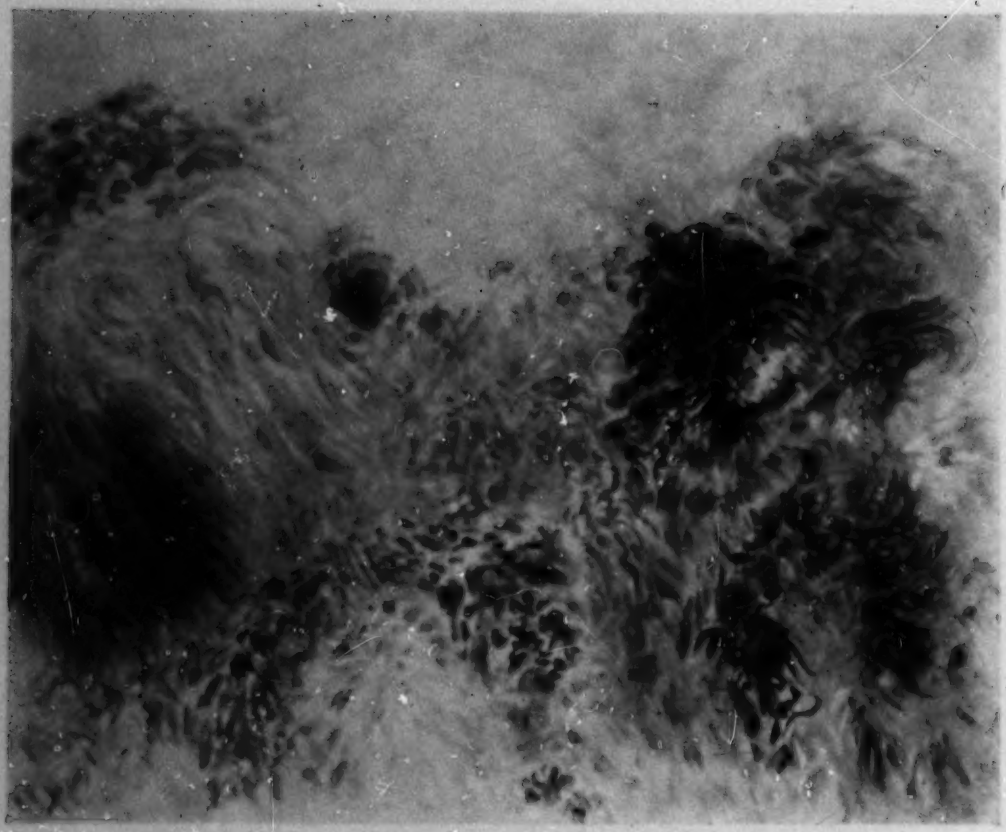

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in oils which the cubists had always held in suspicion, which they had even tried to replace by other techniques. Let anyone look at Masson's recent canvasses with an unprejudiced eye and he will see that no detail is imitative, but that only the whole, an actual plastic writing, is apparent. He will see that there is no longer anything of the conventional occidental theater-set with its center-stage, its wings, its backdrop. Only one painter preceded Masson in this respect: Turner.

Yet Masson goes further. The viewer, within himself, finds that he is in the middle of the picture; so to speak, within a "space which has become active, growing, ripening, vanishing," to use Masson's own words. A great writer as well as a great painter, like Delacroix, he has written better

about his own art than anyone else could.

Already, other painters are joining André Masson. The great god Pan is reborn, and man is no longer isolated in the midst of a world of which he is a part. In the plastic art of his time, he regains everything that binds him to the universe. This art is capable of articulating everything that excites us. Let us be thankful to André Masson for the happiness he shares with us. We had need of this consolation.

—Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler

[25] Nude. 16½ x 10¾" *Lithograph*

[26] Verona. 14 x 17¾" *Lithograph*

[28] Pomegranates. 9 x 11" *Color lithograph*

CATALOGUE

OILS

[1] *Waterfall after a Storm*
1951. 39⅛ x 16⅞"

[2] *Canal in Venice*
1951. 21¾ x 23"

[3] *Lagoon*
1951. 29⅛ x 57¼"

[4] *Man with Horses*
1951. 33¼ x 51"

[5] *Horse Fair*
1952. 50 x 41"

[6] *The Garden*
1952. 31½ x 39"

[7] *Pomegranates*
1952. 38¾ x 16"

[8] *Landscape with Fishermen*
1952. 19 x 50¼"

[9] *The Seine at Roche-Guyon*
1952. 23¼ x 46¾"

[10] *Bather at a Fountain*
1952. 31½ x 25¼"

[11] *Fish and Plants*
1952. 21¼ x 12¾"

[12] *Red Fish and Chrysanthemums*
1952. 23¾ x 7½"

[13] *Bathers at a Spring*
1952. 50½ x 25¾"

[14] *Avalanch*
1952. 39½ x 17¾"

[15] *Pomegranate Branch*
1952. 17½ x 31¼"

[16] *Two Birds*
1952. 11¾ x 29¼"

[17] *Spring Moon*
1952. 22½ x 21¾"

DRAWINGS

[18] *Nude with Raised Arms*
1953. Ink. 25¾ x 19½"

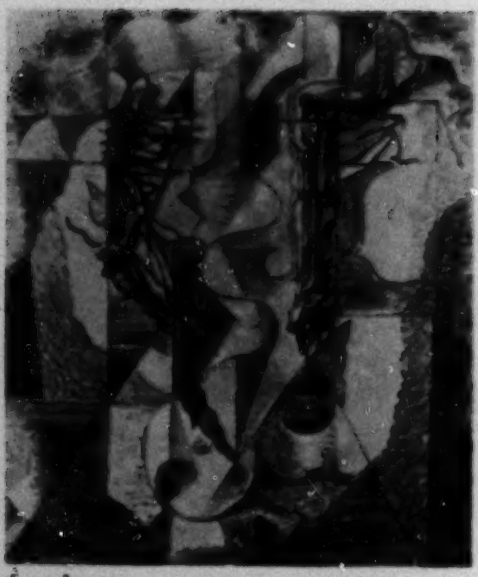
[19] *Pines and Rocks*
1953. Wash. 25¾ x 19½"

[20] *Young Wild Boar*
1953. Wash. 25¾ x 19½"

1924

[32]

1925



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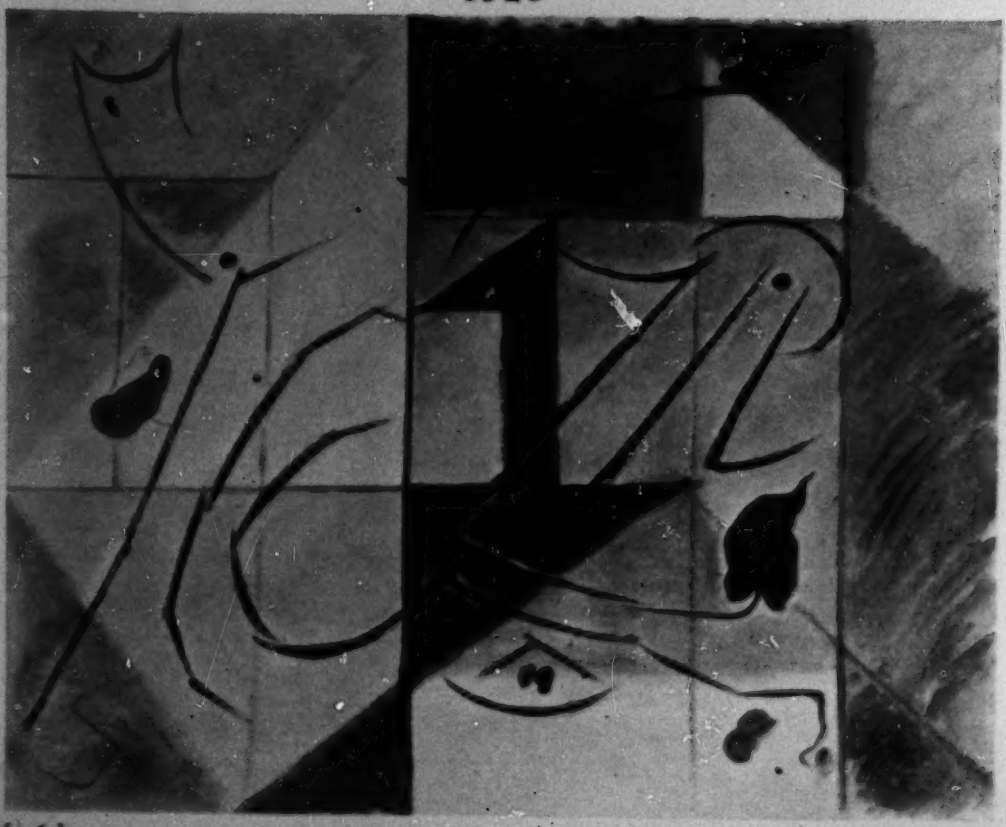
1928



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[21] *Sleeping Cat*
1953. Wash. 25¾ x 19"

[22] *Pines in the Mist*
1953. Wash. 25¾ x 19½"

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[23] *Voyage à Venise*
1952. 41 Color lithographs
Limited edition of 50 copies.

[24-30] *Lithographs 1951-1952*

EARLIER PAINTINGS

[31] *Domino Players*
1923. 13½ x 10 ⅝"

[32] *Tomb by the Sea*
1924. 35¾ x 28¼"

[33] *Anatomical Studies*
1925. 28½ x 23½"

[34] *Ruins*
1926. 13¾ x 9¾"

1934

[37]

1936

[38]

[35] *Children of the Island*
1927. 36 x 23⅝"

[36] *Metamorphosis*
1928. 23¾ x 28⅛"

[37] *Summer Diversion*
1934. 36⅛ x 29"

[38] *Mythological Bullfight*
1936. 35 x 33¼"

[39] *Bison*
1944. 10 x 12½"

[40] *Wounded Bather*
1946. 32¾ x 29½"

[41] *Ox Skull and Pomegranates*
1947. 25½" x 18"

[42] *River through the Trees*
1948. 39 x 31½"

1947

[41]

1948

[42]

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